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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 RANGOON 000059

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [PINR](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: GAMBARI MEETS WITH GOB REPS AND AUNG SAN SUU KYI;
BRIEFS DIPLOMATIC CORPS

REF: 2008 RANGOON 679

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Classified By: P/E Chief Jennifer Harhigh for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

11. (SBU) UN Special Representative Ibrahim Gambari arrived in Rangoon Saturday, January 31 for his seventh visit to Burma. He met with GOB officials including Foreign Minister Nyan Win and outlined his priorities -- achieving progress on his "five-point agenda," political facilitation between the regime and the opposition, and preparing for a possible visit to Burma by UNSYG Ban -- to UN country team members January 31 and to chiefs of mission February 1. He told the COMs one of his arguments with Burma authorities is that they ought to signal flexibility to ASEAN, the new U.S. Administration, and the SYG. Gambari met with Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) and five members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) Central Executive Committee (CEC) for nearly 90 minutes February 2. Gambari will reportedly travel to Nay Pyi Taw February 3 for meetings with senior GOB officials; it is unclear if he will meet again with ASSK or diplomats prior to his departure from Burma, currently scheduled for late February 3. End Summary.

Meeting with NLD, Aung San Suu Kyi

12. (C) The highlight of Gambari's visit thus far was his meeting February 2 with ASSK and five members of the NLD CEC, aka the Uncles, from approximately 10 a.m. until 11:20 a.m. at a government guest house. According to NLD Spokesman Nyan Win, ASSK initially met for 15 minutes beforehand with the Uncles and then spent over an hour with Gambari and the five Uncles, who apparently had been selected for the meeting by the GOB. Nyan Win said CEC member U Lwin did not attend because of poor health and Win Tin and Khin Maung Shwe were not invited.

13. (C) According to Nyan Win -- who was not present -- the

NLD reiterated its four key objectives: release of all political prisoners, convening of the 1990 parliament, an inclusive dialogue, and a review of the regime's proposed constitution. The NLD said it does not think UNSYG Ban should visit Burma unless he could achieve at least the release of all political prisoners. Nyan Win said Gambari raised his proposal for an economic forum, but the NLD declined to discuss it. ASSK pointed out that there is no rule of law in Burma under which to undertake such a project.

She noted that Win Tin and Khin Maung Shwe (both long-term political prisoners released last September) are members of the CEC, and she expressed regret that the two were not invited. (Note: During the diplomatic briefing February 1 (see below), Gambari remarked that he needed an opportunity to meet ASSK during this visit because "it is critical to know what she thinks on everything." He said the Burma authorities have always facilitated meetings for him with ASSK, and her refusal to meet with him last August was "unfortunate." End note.)

Meetings with UN, TCG, "Spokes-Authoritative Team"

14. (U) Upon arriving in Rangoon Saturday, January 31, Gambari had an initial session with FM Nyan Win before meeting with the UN Country Team and with Tripartite Core Group (TCG) Chair U Kyaw Thu and Thai Ambassador Bansarn Bunnag in his capacity as ASEAN representative to the TCG. Thereafter, Gambari met with the "SPDC Spokes-Authoritative Team:" Minister of Information Brigadier General Kyaw Hsan, Foreign Minister Nyan Win, and Minister of Culture Major General Khin Aung Myint. He met separately with Minister of Labor and Minister of Relations (GOB-appointed liaison to

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ASSK) Aung Kyi, with Minister of Health Dr. Kyaw Myint, and with Referendum Commission officials and senior members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), before attending a dinner hosted by Minister Kyaw Hsan. We have no readouts yet on those meetings.

Gambari Discusses Priorities with Diplomats

15. (SBU) During an hour-long session with chiefs of mission in the late afternoon of February 1, Gambari began by noting this is his seventh visit to Burma and seven is a lucky number in his native Nigeria. He expressed hope for very tangible results, while noting his good offices mission is a process not an event; it is a means to an end. He praised collaboration between the GOB and the international community on the Cyclone Nargis response, noting that the TCG and the coming launch of the Post-Nargis Relief and Recovery Plan (PONREPP) lay out a framework for future effort, including in "other areas."

16. (SBU) Gambari observed that the SYG's "good offices" mandate had been reaffirmed in December. He outlined three focuses for his visit:

--First, the Secretary General expects more progress on the "five-point agenda." (Note: that includes: release of political prisoners, including ASSK; resumption of an enhanced political dialogue between the GOB and ASSK; a proposal to establish a broad-based national mechanism to address socio-economic concerns; ways to enhance the credibility of the process leading to elections by 2010; and regularization of the UN good offices mission. End note.)

--Second, is political facilitation -- bridging the gap between the government and the opposition. Gambari said last time the Foreign Minister asked him to talk with the opposition to find areas of agreement, disagreement, and possible convergence. Gambari has asked the GOB for time and opportunity, a balanced schedule that could lead to a fruitful outcome.

--Third, is to prepare for UNSYG Ban's possible return to Burma. The SYG is ready to return but wants to focus on issues other than Nargis. He would want "very meaningful outcomes" in a "conducive atmosphere."

...And Potential "Avenues" for GOB to Explore

17. (SBU) In soliciting the views and advice of the diplomatic community, Gambari said the UN is looking at ways to "elevate other pillars of engagement with Burma, not in a way that would downgrade the political pillar but in a way that would raise the remaining two -- humanitarian and developmental." He told diplomats that the SYG had challenged the Group of Friends in December to come up with suggestions for a "tool box" to engage with the Burmese authorities. He will press for progress on political and human rights issues, but he also needs "tools of interest to Myanmar." Gambari said he is emphasizing four "avenues, opportunities" for sending the right signals to the international community in talks with GOB officials: his own visit; upcoming ASEAN meetings (including the ASEAN sessions) in Thailand; possible policy shifts in the new U.S. administration if Burma sends the right signals; and the possibility of a SYG visit.

UK and U.S. to Gambari: Situation Worsening; GOB Must Unclench Fist

18. (SBU) The UK Ambassador told Gambari it has been a bad

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12 months, as evidenced by 2200 political prisoners, convictions with lengthy sentences, no progress on political dialogue, economic mismanagement and recently Rohingyas risking their lives to flee the country. The work in the Delta is something to be proud of and the large sums contributed by the UK, US, EU and Australia demonstrate that "non-traditional donors" will make tangible commitments to a better Burma if there is political change. That is a "huge addition" to the SYG's tool box. The UK Ambassador later added that the international community should perhaps focus on non-financial incentives, such as status in the international community, guarantees of territorial integrity, etc. It should be made clear that the world is not seeking regime change in Burma, merely improved government behavior. The UK Ambassador noted that the election process could be healing or divisive; thus far it has been divisive.

19. (SBU) Gambari and the assembled diplomats agreed that the next 12 months will be pivotal for Burma's future. In response to the UK, Gambari noted that elections can promote unity or disunity; he wants to encourage ways to promote unity. He agreed with the idea of including "status" issues in the toolbox, saying he would like to see Burma as a respected and responsible member of the international community rather than as the subject of UNGA resolutions.

110. (SBU) The CDA agreed with the UK view that the internal political situation has worsened. He urged Gambari to focus on the need to release political prisoners, including but not limited to Aung San Suu Kyi, and on the need for truly meaningful dialogue. Regarding Gambari's mention of a possible opportunity for engagement with the new U.S. administration, the CDA, noting that he has not yet received instructions from Washington, said he expects a review of U.S. policies is occurring across the board, including about Burma. He referred to a portion of President Obama's Inaugural Address ("we will extend our hand if you will unclench your fist") and said now would be an opportune time for the Burmese regime to unclench its fists.

111. (C) Gambari pledged to continue to press for the release of political prisoners as part of his five-point

agenda. He added that he has known new U.S. Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice since the 1990s when she was A/S for African Affairs. Gambari said Ambassador Rice told him she is anxious to see the results of Gambari's mission which can help the new U.S. Administration formulate its Burma policy.

(Note: During his round of greetings, Gambari asked CDA, "When is the U.S. going to return its representation in Burma to "ambassador?" The CDA replied, "That is really up to the Burmese," prompting Gambari to chuckle and say "that sounds like the right response." End note.)

Russians Push for a "Friendly Dialogue"

¶12. (SBU) The French and Italian Ambassadors commented on the need for free and fair elections and the French expressed hope Gambari would meet with ASSK. The Russian Ambassador objected to the somber assessments by the U.S. and the UK, saying the situation has not worsened in the last 12 months; Burma is not a threat to regional peace and security; no extraordinary measures are needed; and, while the Gambari mission is important, it should just be a "friendly dialogue."

Possible Visit to Nay Pyi Taw

¶13. (C) Chris Kaye, Country Director for the UN's World Food Programme, confirmed that Gambari traveled to the Delta the afternoon of Feb. 2 and was scheduled to return in the evening. We are told Gambari resisted that schedule item, presumably thinking he should be focusing on his core agenda,

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but apparently he wasn't successful. Although at Sunday's briefing neither Gambari's personal assistant nor MFA protocol officials expected he would travel to Nay Pyi Taw, Gambari reportedly told the NLD CEC he would travel there on February 3 to meet with GOB officials. Yin Yin Oo, the MFA Americas Division Director, told us she had no specific information on Gambari's program in Nay Pyi Taw because it would be handled by the International Organizations Department. Nonetheless, she speculated that if he is traveling there, it is to see Senior General Than Shwe, unless "the senior general is not feeling well, in which case he would see Number 2" (referring to Vice-Senior General Maung Aye). (Note: Rumors of a serious Than Shwe illness continue. He did not host the Thai military commander who visited last week. He did not accept credentials of the new Chinese ambassador this week, though the Chinese embassy here reportedly assumed that would happen. End note.)

Comment: Perhaps a Twitch of the Fist?

¶14. (C) As usual, the GOB is strictly controlling Gambari's schedule. Gambari's Special Assistant Erwan Pouchous, when approached, told us that Gambari had not received word of our request for a meeting between him and the CDA (sent via dip note to MFA). Pouchous noted that Gambari's schedule was under "tight control" and only known "day-by-day."

¶15. (C) A predictable session yesterday with diplomats, stock GOB meetings, and evidence the regime is strictly controlling the program were worrisome signs; but the meeting today with Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD CEC members was somewhat encouraging. That joint meeting among ASSK, the Uncles, and Gambari may have been a first. Furthermore, if the report that ASSK was allowed to meet the Uncles privately before seeing Gambari is true, it would be a sign the regime is willing to give a little. The last time she was allowed to meet with CEC members was January 2008.

¶16. (C) Gambari said he presumed he would have an opportunity to brief the dip corps again before departure. As of COB February 2, we have received no confirmation. He said that, after departing Burma, he will brief the SYG in

New Delhi and continue on to China, Japan, and Brussels (EU)
before returning to New York.
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